

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSING COMMITTEE

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MARCH 3, 2022

S.B. 169 – AN ACT CONCERNING A STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING POLICIES IN THE STATE.

Senator Lopes, Representative Williams, Senator Cicarella, Representative Polletta, and members of the committee, my name is Sean Ghio. I am policy director at the Partnership for Strong Communities – a statewide nonprofit policy and advocacy organization dedicated to ending homelessness, expanding the creation of affordable housing, and building strong communities in Connecticut. Thank for you the opportunity to submit testimony today.

I write to express concerns with SB. 169 – An Act Concerning a Study of the Effects of Affordable Housing Policies in the State. This bill directs the Commissioner of Housing to study the effects of Section 8-30g on the state. Section 8-30g is one of the state's most important zoning laws and is a key statute in inducing towns to comply with their long-standing obligations under the state's Zoning Enabling Act to "promote housing choice and economic diversity in housing, including housing for both low- and moderate-income households." We support policies that strengthen Section 8-30g to allow for the creation of affordable housing more easily in communities across the state.

Connecticut's economy remains needlessly weighed down by our [extraordinarily high housing costs](#). Rents have skyrocketed, increasing by 15% in the last two years. Half of renters and a third of homeowners now pay more than 30% of their income on housing. Incredibly, 250,000 households pay more than 50% of their income towards housing costs, leaving families with little to spend on necessities like food, healthcare, and transportation. A 2021 [study](#) commissioned by Connecticut's Department of Housing found an 86,000 unit gap in affordable housing needed for very low-income households.

Housing construction through Section 8-30g boosts family budgets and local economies. Connecticut's high housing costs [critically wound economic growth](#) efforts, deterring young professionals, families, and businesses from staying or locating in Connecticut. Limiting new housing supply leads to a misallocation of labor as higher housing costs prevent workers from moving to or remaining in cities with greater employment opportunities. A [2019 report](#) found housing constraints lowered U.S. economic growth by 36 percent between 1964 and 2009. Preventing housing development through exclusionary zoning is a prime contributor to high housing costs. Research shows a consistent relationship between [household cost burdens and economic performance](#). Locations with lower housing and transportation costs have experienced better economic outcomes. When a family that previously spent more than half their income on housing moves into an affordable home created through Section 8-30g, their annual disposable income will increase by [\\$7,000 on](#)

[average](#). Families put that newfound money back into the local economy purchasing healthcare, food, and other essentials.

If you are concerned with reducing racial and economic segregation, closing the achievement gap, and improving access to good jobs, creating integrated communities with a diversity of housing choices with Section 8-30g is essential.

Healthy communities need a diversity of people and housing to thrive, but Connecticut's towns are becoming even less diverse. Our cities and towns have become increasingly racially and economically segregated. Two of every three persons of color in Connecticut live in just 15 of the state's 169 towns – all of which have a supply of affordable homes adequate to exempt them from Section 8-30g. According to the CT Fair Housing Center, Connecticut is in the [top 15 most segregated states](#) in the country and is more segregated than several southern states, including Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia. Connecticut is the most segregated state in New England.

The state has an interest in ensuring its citizens are safely, adequately, and affordably housed. **Section 8-30g, through its 30 percent set-aside program, is Connecticut's only state tool to grow our supply of affordable housing without expending state funding, and it has succeeded.** More than 7,500 affordable homes have been built across the state through Section 8-30g's set-aside program and thousands more affordable homes have been created for residents who otherwise would not have had the opportunities these homes have provided.

In my [2021 analysis](#) of the state's Affordable Housing Appeals Lists from 2002 – 2020, I found that deed restrictions requiring housing affordability are an important and growing part of the overall assisted housing supply. **The supply of homes with deed restrictions preserving affordability grew by 150% in nineteen years.** These units are distributed more broadly across the state in 2020 than in 2002, providing valuable affordable housing opportunities in many communities that are otherwise lacking in assisted housing.

Section 8-30g does not require any town to build housing. If a developer is willing and prepared to build inclusionary housing, the town may deny the application if it can show that the development would significantly threaten public health or safety. It is the town's lagging efforts to promote and generate diverse housing that triggers the use of Section 8-30g.

Thanks to Section 8-30g, a town cannot avoid affordable housing development by simply zoning it out or by saying we don't need any more housing.

We need more and stronger tools to make developing lower cost housing easier near our transit system and across the state. Section 8-30g is one very essential component of housing policy. It was never intended to be the solution to Connecticut's housing affordability crisis. We need expanded rental assistance programs, affordable housing construction funding, and land use reforms to truly resolve our housing crisis. Weakening Section 8-30g would make it more difficult to build affordable housing -- moving the state further away from affordably housing its residents at a time of growing need.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

